

MEDIA RELEASE

Hope Endures

by Colette Livermore

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The first memoir ever written of life as a nun in Mother Teresa's order – the Missionaries of Charity.

Colette Livermore was only eighteen years old when, inspired by a film about Mother Teresa's work with the sick and dying in Calcutta, she gave up the opportunity to study medicine and instead joined the Missionaries of Charity. So began a journey that took Colette – who was renamed by the order as Sister Tobit – from her home in New South Wales to many of the most desperate countries in the world. Ultimately, she herself experienced inner turmoil, disillusionment and a crisis of faith.

Mother Teresa was a recipient of the Noble Peace Prize, a patron figure for the recent World Youth Day in Sydney, and is now on the path to becoming saint in the Catholic Church. The images of her attending to emaciated and neglected people on the streets of Calcutta and elsewhere inspired thousands of young men and women to join her organisation. But what was it like to live under her rule? What principles underpinned her way of life? How many left her order broken and disillusioned?

It is surprising that these questions are not asked more frequently.

The structure of the Missionaries of Charity demanded that adherents totally surrender their own will. Based on an older form of Catholic religious life that taught blind obedience as a way of serving God, the order was threaded with anti-intellectualism and preoccupied with personal sinfulness, penance, humiliation and renunciation. When this rigid system came into contact with the disorderly demands of the poor – people struggling to survive on the garbage dumps and streets of the world – conflicts of conscience were sure to arise. Should a Missionary of Charity give priority to the orders of her superiors, or should she respond to the urgent needs of the poor and sick?

Some people have been damaged by following Mother Teresa's way of life. *Hope Endures* is one sister's story – a story that has never before been told.

Please turn over for a letter from Colette Livermore

COLETTE LIVERMORE WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEW IN SYDNEY AND BRISBANE IN THE WEEK COMMENCING 10 NOVEMBER.

For further information or to request an interview, please media@randomhouse.com.au

Dear Reader,

My memoir, *Hope Endures*, describes life within Mother Teresa's order – the Missionaries of Charity. It tells of my journey from certainty to doubt, and is also an account of those people I met on the way who struggle to survive on the margins of society, uncertain if they will survive.

My conviction that a person should not be left to die on the streets led me to join Mother Teresa's order in 1973. I had watched human skeletons from Biafra in Africa staring at me from my television set, and I felt that working with Mother Teresa was a way to respond in some way to the inequality in the world.

Hope Endures is the story of my training as a sister in the Missionaries of Charity, an order that demanded blind obedience and intellectual submission. I went on to work with people who survived by foraging on garbage dumps in crowded cities, and others who eked out an existence on the footpaths of Calcutta and Manila. As I tried to help the people I met, I often felt an incomprehensible conflict between my vow to obey and my vow to serve, between compassion and the religious strictures of my order.

Mother Teresa is an inspiration for many people around the world, but I discovered that the order she founded was rent with contradictions, and after eleven years these paradoxes became impossible for me to resolve. I realised that to deny my inner convictions was to betray those whom I was trying to serve, and that no organisation should ask that of its members.

I left the order in 1984, despite pressure to stay. I studied medicine, graduated as a doctor in 1991, then worked in outback Australia and in East Timor. I could not reconcile the experiences of my life with my Catholic faith, and in time I became agnostic, unable to hold on to a faith which, until then, had been the foundation of my life.

In 2001 Mother Teresa's private letters were published, and I discovered that although she presented a cheerful façade of absolute certainty, she too had doubts about God's existence.

She was able to dismiss them as persistent temptations associated with the 'dark night of the soul'.

We live in a time of transition. Many of us were born into a faith but will die as non-believers. For true hope to endure, we need to face the truth unflinchingly. I hope you enjoy reading my book, not only to gain some insight into life within Mother Teresa's order but also to understand why I had to leave it. No person should be asked to submit to a religious obedience that asks them to betray their inner convictions. Let us hope that even without the inspiration of belief, we can continue to reach out to those who desperately need our help.

Thank you,

Colette Livermore